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AUTHOR Meltzer, Phyllis
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ABSTRACT

As new types of volunteers come into the field--working people, retirees, executives--new methods are needed to hold their interest and ensure their cooperation while preserving the goals of the organizations they serve. Some of those organizations, especially museums, are using volunteer service agreements to attract and hold volunteers and to enhance their experiences while increasing their usefulness to the museum. Volunteer service agreements spell out what is expected of volunteers in terms of knowledge, experience, amount of work time, attendance at training courses, and other items, while also spelling out the obligations of the museum to provide insurance, learning opportunities, training, and so forth. Volunteer managers should seek input from volunteers when setting up and developing programs to meet their training and continuing education needs. Continuing education programs should be self-directed as far as possible and should have built-in evaluation processes. Volunteer service agreements allow volunteers to take greater responsibility for their own learning with concommitant enthusiasm and dedication to the museum, while allowing volunteer managers to grow in their jobs; such agreements align the activities of both with the mission of the museum. (KC)

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Phyllis Meltzer
Consultant in Adult Education and
Volunteer Management
1000 S. Juanita Ave.
Redondo Beach, CA 90277
(213-540-6037

Volunteer Service Agreements: A New Strategy for Volunteer Management

Volunteer managers are expressing their need for ways to reduce volunteer turnover, provide new training strategies, and maintain enthusiasm. Managers have been heard to complain, "The hardest thing I've ever had to do is fire a docent: I felt terrible for days. She wouldn't learn about the new objects in the 20th century gallery." Or, "When I told the docents we were instituting evaluations they raised Cain!" Volunteers, whether experienced "old-timers" or new to museum work, complain about their lack of satisfaction--or just leave.

Such problems in volunteer management suggest the application of a strategy used in higher education based on adult education theories: the learning contract adapted for use in museums. Volunteer service agreements encourage self-directed learning for the volunteers, allow the volunteer coordinator to create innovative educational strategies, better serve the museum and its public.

Problems may be due partly to the newer categories of people who are volunteers:

> Volunteerism used to be the undisputed province of the nonworking woman, but the image is changing. There are now more volunteers who hold full-time jobs.... Retirees are also joining the volunteer ranks in large numbers, and many bring specialized and valuable expertise to the museum. Corporations

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often encourage their employees to get involved in community activities. ....

Just as the profile of volunteers is changing, so is volunteer style and purpose. Museum volunteers now expect greater responsibility and opportunity for personal growth, and museums are requiring more rigorous training programs...(1)

According to this report and other recent studies of volunteer profiles, new segments of the population increasingly are volunteering in museums and other non-profit organizations. These new volunteers consist in greater numbers of highly educated, work experienced adults who are accustomed to participation in decisions which affect their lives.

In the past several years many museums have instituted the use of some form of contractual agreement with volunteers in an effort to clarify the museum's expectations and encourage commitment. The Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, for example, this year, formulated a contract which all new volunteers are asked to sign. It was created by the volunteer coordinator working closely with a committee of current volunteers. By signing this contract, volunteers agree to all the required training and touring obligations stated in the document. On the same sheet of paper the obligations offered by the museum are stated: supervision, training, insurance, etc. Other contractual arrangements may range from asking a prospective volunteer to sign his or her name to a letter which states general duties to a volunteer indicating, by signature, familiarity with all rules and regulations of the museum volunteer program (Smithsonian Institution's VIARC). While such "contractual" documents clarify the expectations of

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the museum they may fail to provide for the expression of individual resources, experiences, and personal needs of the new profile as well as the traditional volunteer.

Regardless of the "profile" of volunteers it is acknowledged that each comes to volunteerism seeking satisfaction of individual personal needs, among which are: self-actualization, continuing education, growth experiences, socialization, and association with professionals in the museum. To put them in learning situations which deny the need for self determination defeats in large measure their reasons for volunteering.

In order to heighten commitment, it is necessary as a comcommitant requirement to clarify the museum's objectives for volunteers while aligning volunteer activities with the performance standards and policy of the museum.

A volunteer service agreement enables the volunteer manager to create opportunities for volunteers to take additional responsibility for acquisition of their knowledge and skills, engage the interest and expertise of other museum staff members in the volunteers' learning/training strategies, integrate volunteer activities into the overall mission of the museum, and become involved themselves in the excitement of continung their own learning while empowering others in their pursuit of knowledge as together they create a stronger identification with the museum.

The volunteer service agreement is a document which is formulated on the specific needs of the group or individual volunteer, taking into account the academic and performance standards of the museum. It is a process which specifies the learning objectives to be acquired, the

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learning resources to be used, target dates for their accomplishment, demonstration that objectives have been reached, and how evidence will be validated (evaluation). (See Figure 1).

Learning contracts, popularized in higher education institutions in the 1960s, allowed students to individualize their educational objectives while complying with college requirements: application to volunteers and museums is an adaptation of that strategy. Learning agreements are currently widely used in professional continuing education courses for medical personnel, supervised field experiences (internships), and management development training programs.

Malcolm Knowles, one of the outstanding pioneers in adult education, is credited with popularizing the term "andragogy," "the art and science of helping people learn." Andragogy (the opoposite end of the continuum from pedagogy) is based on theories of how adults learn effectively. Effective and long-term learning occur when adults perceive instructional strategies that satisfy their "need to know." (6) Effective andragogical learning experiences are analagous to the adults' desire for self-directedness, his ability to build upon previous experiences, and the desire tolearn things that are applicable to his life's role. A climate conducive to learning enhances the individual's ability to gain new knowledge and skills. Figure 2 lists "climates" in which adults learn best.

The volunteer manager, aware of the difficulty of implementing change, may wish to begin with a pilot project or a specific group of volunteers to test her strategies and gain acceptance. The volunteer service agreement may be used in addition to regular training sessions and/or to renew waning enthusiasm for long term volunteers. A

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strategic program must be established to implement a volunteer service agreement. Several steps are necessary:

- o Host an orientation session to familiarize the group with volunteer service agreements which involve taking greater responsibility for one's own learning.
- o Consult with a professor of adult education familiar with learning contracts. Familiarity with Malcolm Knowles' book, Using Learning Contracts(2), explanatory in its range of examples and "how to" information. Current literature on research is this area is available in social science data bases.
- o Review the museum's mission statement to align the volunteers' activities with those goals.

Meet with members of the professional staff: curators, exhibition designers, and administrators to engage their cooperation and explain your goals.

- o Create a volunteer policy statement which contains the overall requirements for volunteer service: required meetings, attendance, length of commitment, base levels of competencies (skills), etc. This policy statement, shared with current and prospective volunteers, presents the museum's requirements for all volunteers (or specialized segments such as docents).
- o Meet with representatives of the volunteer corp (experienced and novice) to review implementation strategies and gain insight into their thoughts and needs.
- o Create volunteer learning teams to review strategies, act as mentors, evaluators, and liason. Decide together on the degree of

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freedom and number of options that will be comfortable for the volunteer manager and the volunteers. Will volunteers be granted major responsiblity for their own learning or will a choice of several structured options be provided, or something in between?

Figure 1 is an example of a volunteer service agreement for one group of docents in a natural history museum. The volunteer coordinator, in conjunction with staff experts, determines competency descriptions for each volunteer tour: for example, what is the basic knowledge required for a docent to give a tour in the Marine Hall? A written or oral test is administered. Docents needing additional knowledge about the hall create their own study group, meeting at a time convenient for them. The gaps in their knowledge is the basis for that specific volunteer agreement. In formulating their own learning contract, with the volunter manager as facilitator, they determine specific learning tasks, the resources that will best serve, time limits for their acquisition, as well as built-in evaluation strategies.

When agreement on learning goals and means for achieving them has been reached by the volunteers and the volunteer manager, a meeting is held with the person(s) who will validate that learning has taken place (and who may offer additional suggestions for resources). In the example (Fig. 1.), one reviewer is the curator of the Marine Hall. Agreement may be negotiated on how this knowledge will be demonstrated: a tour which the curator witnesses; a written paper, reviewed by the curator, which will be shared with other docents, etc. Flexibility in the plan is a given and it can be renegotiated at any time, depending on time restraints, the needs of the group, new information, or other

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factors.

The volunteers then take responsibility for learning the new information. Regular meetings are established with the volunteer manager to discuss their progress and to offer support and suggestions. Completion of the tasks infering acquisiton of the desired knowledge is demonstrated as agreed.

Agreements may be formulated so that groups of volunteers with similar needs work together, in cooperation with their supervisor. Experienced volunteers who already possess the needed skills may serve as resource persons, evaluators, or mentors during the learning process.

The volunteer manager has a new role. She becomes a facilitator, a broker, mentor, and colleague, in the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Her expertise has new applications: by sharing her knowledge of resources, both within the museum and elsewhere, knowledge of the museum's goals for its volunteer program, and enthusiasm for helping others learn, (and learning new things herself), she redefines her job. But, in this atmosphere of mutual respect, she also is obligated to clearly specify the obligations of the museum: what will be provided for the volunteer? Will regular training sessions be held at convenient times? When will the library be available for research? How will docents be able to demonstrate their new knowledge?

When competencies for all volunteer activities are identified in conjunction with the museum's mission, a "job" description emerges which details required competencies. This description becomes a valuable resource when interviewing potential volunteers to assess their skills and/or gaps in knowledge. Volunteer service agreements

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then may be formulated to meet those needs and make use of the individual strengths which volunteers bring to their museum service. For example, a docent in an art museum who has strong public speaking skills but lacks knowledge in modern art, may not need to attend training sessions on speaking techniques. She and those who share those skills may wish to devote their learning time to studying 20th century American sculpture or the effect of industrialization on 19th century English painters.

In addition to enabling volunteers to gain new knowledge, volunteer service agreements may be used successfully to help docents enhance other needed, museum related skills such as speaking to groups of children, learning to ask open ended questions, giving tours to foreign born adults, or learning to enthusiastically respond to questions.

Service agreements, of course, may be used with volunteers other than docents: their use is appropriate whenever one has a "need to know" and an obligation to perform within the guidelines of the institution: information providers, library workers, gift shop volunteers, etc. Volunteers who act as curatorial assistants may devise service agreements to enhance their skill in handling objects or increase their understanding of cataloging and storage methodology. Agreements can be formulated to enhance and inculcate museum-related values and attitudes, as well.

Student interns in museums respond well to the structured nature of learning contracts wherein requirements are stated and objectives clarified. Staff personnel working on special projects which require new knowledge and/or skills are likely candidates and may enjoy formulating learning contracts.

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The obligatory word of caution: when introducing a new strategy into an established institution it is necessary to proceed in small stages and to secure the enthusiasm of the target group. This can be accomplished by fully explaining the goals and methods to be used. Volunteer managers will not lose control, they will, instead, empower those they supervise to gain more control over their own learning: something they do, as productive adults, all the time, anyway. One fear that volunteer managers have is that they don't know enough to implement volunteer service agreements: facilitation skills will increase in time as practice in introducing, formulating and enacting service agreements becomes rewarding.

Volunteer service agreements will allow volunteers to take greater responsibility for their own learning with concommitant enthusiasm and dedication to the museum, it will allow volunteer managers to grow in their jobs by managing those they supervise in conjunction with adult learning theory, and align both of their activities with the overall mission of the museum. Visitors will be met with knowledgeable, skilled, and enthusiastic volunteers. Museums, by incorporating volunteer service agreements, will achieve the desireable condition presented in Museums for a New Century:

> Museums are asking more of their volunteers. And they're getting what they ask for in a new breed of committed, versatile people who perform integral services of all kinds in museums.

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4. M. Knowles, "Adult Learning: Theory and Practice." Ed. L. Nadler, The Handbook of Human Resource Development (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1984) 613-23.

5. A. Tough, The Adults' Learning Projects, (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1979).

6. AAM, op cit.

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Figure 1

VOLUNTEER LEARNING AGREEMENT

AREA OF INVESTIGATION: whales and whale related artifacts GOAL: Become more knowledgeable about whales, etc.

Docent study group: Marine Hall docent Provisionals Participant: M. Smith

Volunteer manager: J. Jones Date started: 12/15/87 Date completed: 3/23/88

What I Am Going to Learn (Area and Objectives)	How I Am Going to Learn It (Resources and Strategies)	Target Dates	How I Am Going to Know That I Have Learned It (Evidence)	How I Am Going to Document/ Prove I Have Learned It (Verification)	Museum Agrees to Provide Assistance
1. Increase background knowledge of great whales to improve my tours in museum include: migratory and feeding patterns, physiology.	Read _____.	12/30/87	Take written test prepared by curator.	Curator will review scores with study group.	Access to museum library materials.
	Attend docent training class on whales.	1/7/88	Use new knowledge on tours in Marine Hall	Docents (experienced) will accompany tour; offer comments and suggestions.	Lecture by curator at monthly training meeting.
	Accompany experienced docents on tours in Marine Hall.	1/5 & 9/88	Write paper on whale migration for presentation at docent training meeting.	Volunteer manager will review and comment.	Loan videotape materials for home study.
	Watch National Geographic videotape on whales.	1/9/88		Self-awareness	Information about American Cetacean Society meetings
2. Become familiar with how exhibited whale harvesting artifacts were used.	Read curatorial notes in museum library.	2/20/88	Use information on tours and in response to visitors' questions.	Curator will accompany tour; discuss information presented.	Volunteer coordinator will meet monthly with docent study group to discuss learning project progress and suggest strategies.
	Interview Jonah Green, local expert on whaling industry; tape record conversation.	3/17/88	Describe use of 5 artifacts.	Jonah Green will witness tour; discuss information.	
				Volunteer coordinator will review presentation	
3. Learn more about local whale watching excursions (frequent visitor inquiry)	Visit nearby Pt. Vicente whale Watching Station.	2/4/88	Assemble notebook which lists current whale watching opportunities.	Volunteer manager will review notebook; make it available to other docents.	
	Go on American Cetacean Society whale watching excursion; listen to on-board expert lecture.	1/15/88	Respond knowledgeably to visitors' inquiries.	Visitor satisfaction.	
	Attend American Cetacean Society meeting (locally).	3/15/88		Self satisfaction at providing accurate and current information.	

This Learning Agreement may be revised and/or renegotiated with the mutual consent and approval of the volunteer coordinator and the volunteer by (date) if indicated.

Signed (volunteer), (date)

Signed _____, (date)

(volunteer coordinator)

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Malcolm Knowles, a pioneer in adult education, popularized the term "andragogy," "the art and science of helping people learn," proving that effective and long-term learning occur when adults perceive instructional strategies that satisfy their "need to know." (6) Effective andragogical learning experiences are analagous to the adults' desire for self-directedness, his ability to build upon previous experiences, and the desire to learn things that are applicable to his life's role. A climate conducive to learning enhances the individual's ability to gain new knowledge and skills.

CLIMATES IN WHICH ADULT LEARNING IS ENHANCED

1. A climate of mutual respect: people who feel respected are more open to learning.
2. A climate of collaborativeness, not competetiveness: often the richest resources for learning are within the group. Peer helping and sharing are critical.
3. A climate of supportiveness: the volunteer coordinator affirms learners' contributions. Is aware of previous learning anxieties.
4. A climate of mutual trust: volunteer managers are facilitators not controllers of mutual inquiry.
5. A climate of active inquiry: curiosity is stimulated by group and staff support.
6. A climate of openess: learners' contributions and experience is valued and shared.

Adapted from Malcolm Knowles, "Adult Learning: Theory and Practice." Ed., L. Nadler, The Handbook of Human Resource Development, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1984).

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VOLUNTEER SERVICE AGREEMENTS:

Figure 3

LOS ANGELES NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Docent-In-Training-Contract

I AGREE

1. To a three year commitment:
   a. One year of training. b. Two years of weekly school tours.
2. To attend orientation and training sessions as scheduled and to undertake continued training when provided by the Museum.
3. To become thoroughly familiar with the Museum's policies and procedures, both written and verbal.
4. To carry out assignments in good spirits and to seek the assistance of the Education Department in situations requiring guidance.
5. To be prompt and reliable in reporting for scheduled work.
6. to maintain a professional appearance.
7. To notify the School Tours office (213/744-3333) if unable to work as scheduled and to obtain a substitute.
8. To become a member of the Museum and the Docent Roundtable.
9. to accept the Docent Roundtable and the Museum's right to dismiss any docent for poor performance including poor attendance.

THE MUSEUM AGREES:

1. To provide a trained staff member who will be responsible for orientation, training and overall supervision of all docents.
2. To furnish a written description of docent requirements.
3. To train docents to a level that will permit them to work competently.
4. To make written evaluation of docents' performances on the job at suitable and regular intervals.
5. To include docent/staff conferences when possible, and to promote full understanding among the docents of the Museum's operations and decisions.
6. To provide insurance for volunteers injured in the course of volunteer assignments.

DATE_____ DOCENT-IN-TRAINING_____

STAFF_____

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